

## 6/16 Repentance of Others

**Jonah 3:7-9**

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**“By the decree of the king and his nobles:**

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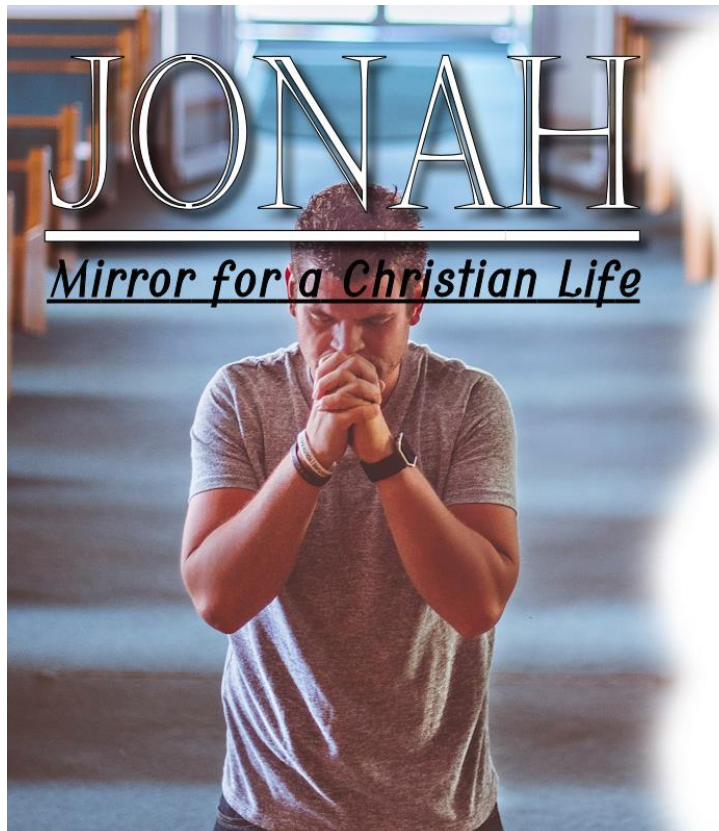
**8 But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.**

**9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”**

**Special Music: “Repent”**

**Mitch Wong**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRoJL9pHxwE>



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## **MORE THAN WE KNOW**

**“Hey there guys and gals, I’m not some great speaker or motivator,” Myron told the students that he was addressing. “As a matter of fact, I’m only here because it is part of my community service due to my own irresponsibility. But here’s the thing, the Parable Sheriff’s Department wants me to tell you how drinking and driving can lead to horrible consequences. And I have done that. Still, I want you to think beyond the slogan “Don’t drink and drive,” as important as that message is. Even more important is to realize that when you get behind the wheel of a car, you become responsible for not only yourselves, but everyone around you. What you do can affect other people’s lives in the most drastic of ways. Your actions, whether you are impaired or not, can change the lives of the people around you, including the ones closest to you, for better or worse. So, take a beat and think about what lies beyond what you are about to do. Thank you for your time.”**

**Myron could tell that the students were bored. It was true. He wasn’t a great speaker, which became obvious by the light smattering of applause by people thinking they were obligated in some way to clap which could barely be heard as the students jumped from their auditorium chairs, allowing the springs of the seats to slap into the backs of the chairs. They had met their obligation for this mandatory presentation. Myron knew that he hadn’t really connected with the audience, but he hoped that in some way he might have planted a seed that would get them all to think about the consequences of their actions. He truly**

believed in the message that he had given and yes, he was disappointed that the students didn't take the matter more seriously.

Deputy Wagner was at the back of the auditorium trying to press brochures into the students' hands as they left, all the while knowing that most of them would wind up either on the floor or in the garbage. Myron had helped her design the brochure which listed all the standard reasons for not driving while intoxicated. On the back was the emblem for the Parable Sheriff's Department, as well as the address and phone number for the office, just in case someone wanted to reach out for more information or even a little support.

Deputy Wagner came over to him and said, "You did a great job, Myron. Really." She paused as she saw the disappointment in Myron's face. "It's Okay," she said. "They don't listen to me either when I talk to them, either. I haven't figured out how to get through to them. We'll continue to work together and find a way to reach them."

Myron appreciated her words, even if he felt they were a little like a coach's speech at halftime in a football game. "You held your ground but came up short. Come on team. Lift your heads and give it your all. Get your head back in the game. We'll get them in the second half. Rah, Rah, Ree. Kick'em in the knee. Rah, Rah, Rass. Kick'em in the other knee." Myron smirked as the thought passed through his mind.

It was still summertime and those that had been in attendance were either in summer school or had recent run-ins with the Sheriff's Department, mostly

petty offences. But Judge Darling was making it a standard part of their community service to attend these presentations.

Myron and Deputy Wagner had collected the names of those in attendance. The students had to sign in to prove to their principal, Mr. Wayfair, that they had attended the presentation. Myron would also send a list of attendees to Judge Darling, both to show here that he was standing firm in his desire to meet his commitments and also for her to know who had taken the time to meet the obligations of their community service.

On the way back to the office, a call came in from the dispatcher, Julie Maxwell. "Marsha," she said to Deputy Wagner, "We got a call a little while ago from Speedy Appleton. He said he needed to see Myron and wants to meet him over at Daisy's at three, if that's okay."

"It's almost three now, so I will just drop Myron off on my way to the office," Deputy Wagner replied. "Wagner out."

"10-4. Dispatch out," came the reply as the radio went silent.

Myron had no idea why Speedy would want to talk to him, but as involved as Myron had become with the Sheriff's office, he had become used to people wanting to speak with him. Especially the high school crowd. Maybe he was making progress after all. He didn't know Speedy well. He was Jeff Appleton's son and a sophomore in high school. His real name was Jeff Jr., but everyone called him Speedy because he always seemed to be running from here to there without any real rhyme or reason. Mr. Appleton was a rancher and extremely

well-off. He owned a quite a few acres just south of Parable where he ran cattle. Mr. Appleton considered himself to be the town's big benefactor, but in reality, he mostly kept to himself and didn't contribute much to ongoings in Parable. That same attitude could often be found in the actions of his son as well.

Speedy was waiting for Myron when he entered the door of the diner. Myron waved at his mother who was busy cleaning up after the lunch crowd. He took a seat at the small table where Speedy was nursing a vanilla shake. Myron could see that the young man was struggling with something. Speedy was a tall, lanky youth with short, sandy hair and clothes always seemed a bit baggy on him. The coach at the high school was constantly begging him to join the basketball team but Speedy remained aloof to sports.

"What's up, Speedy? You wanted to talk?" Myron said trying not to push too hard.

"Well, Myron, it's like this. I need some help. I'm not sure what to do."

"I'm here to help, Speedy. I will do what I can. What's going on?" Myron asked.

Speedy slowly stirred the shake in front of him with the straw. It was obvious he was having trouble talking about whatever was bothering him. Myron started to get up and leave Speedy to his peace. "No. Wait. Please, Myron. I really need your help." Myron sat back down and waited for Speedy to continue.

After a while, he spoke to Myron, almost in a whisper. "You remember last week when Katie Callaway's shed caught fire and burned to the ground?"

Everyone thought it was an accident. Even Ms. Callaway. But the truth is, I did it. I mean... I did mean to. I found a lighter that belonged to my dad and wanted to see if it still worked. I couldn't do that at home. My dad would have killed me. So I went behind Ms. Callaway's shed to test it out. But there was obviously something wrong with the lighter and the flame was much higher than it should have been. I burned my hand and dropped the lighter, ...and you know how dry it's been, ...and the grass behind the shed caught fire and before I could get it put out the shed had already started burning. I just started running. I didn't know what else to do. Ms. Callaway lost all the feed she had for her animals as well as the shed and a bunch of tools she used for her garden. I really messed up here, Myron. And it is killing me not to tell someone."

"Speedy, you need to tell the sheriff what happened," Myron explained to him.

"I can't do that, Myron. My dad will find out and I will be in even more trouble."

"Speedy, you can't keep this hidden. Ms. Callaway has a right to know. And yes, there will probably be some serious ramifications. But here's the thing. You can't go through life avoiding the consequences of your mistakes. It will catch up with you, just like it did me. You need to own up to it and make amends."

"But Myron. I'm really, really sorry. I didn't mean to do it. Don't you think the insurance will cover it?"

**“That’s not up to you, Speedy. Feeling sorry doesn’t solve anything. If you want to make things right, you have to fess up and face the problem. Listen, I will go with you, and we will talk with Sheriff Thom, right now. This is the only way you are going to start feeling better about this. Trust me. I know. Come on. It doesn’t look like you are going to finish that milkshake anyway.”**

**Speedy stared at his hands for a few minutes and it looked like the wheels were spinning in his brain as he came to the right conclusion. He pushed the milkshake back and stood up. “Okay, Myron. But only if you come with me.”**

**“I’ll stay with you the whole time, Speedy,” Myron said as they left the diner together and headed for the Sheriff’s Office. Yes, it seemed like Myron was making some headway in reaching the people in Parable, even if that progress was slow. He felt he was turning a corner into something better than the path he was on before.**

I was born in the mid-50's and spent my childhood in the 60's in the turbulent changes that I often think made us all better people in the long run. As Americans, we saw the advent of rock & roll, the rise of a better understanding of our differences, the progression of free thinking, the glass ceiling being broken for women and people of color. None of which occurred without both physical and psychological struggles as people strove to make us better as a whole in an attempt to free us from prejudice and making us think about the fact that freedom for all really meant freedom for all.

But one of my memories still engrained in my brain was the door-to-door salespeople. Most of us don't think such things should take up pockets in memory banks so we are amazed when those memories come back to the surface. I thought about door-to-door salespeople as I continued to study the third chapter of Jonah.

Although the sixties saw the tapering off of such salespeople, it is amazing to think about all the things that could be bought by someone just walking up to your door with a sale pitch. There were vacuums, magazines, various religions, aluminum siding, Bibles, and even encyclopedias. The very idea of encyclopedias baffles the minds of young people today as they have all the answers they are looking for (misleading as it is at times) at the touch of a button on their computers and phones. Those poor encyclopedia salespeople could never envision a world of such access to all the knowledge of the world. Their pitch that encyclopedias were an investment that would outlast the owners and their children. And, of course, no one is in need of an encyclopedia today.



Okay, so what makes me think of door-to-door salespeople and the third chapter of Jonah? Those salespeople were having a great day if 1 out of 10 doors they knocked on let them in to give their pitch. And of those that let them in, if 1 in 10 of them turned into a sale it was a time to celebrate. These salespeople worked solely on commission. And there were many weeks where no sales were made. There was a very high turnover rate for door-to-door salespeople. It was extremely hard work and you pretty much had to have exhausted all of your other options before you stepped into this kind of a roll. It was a last resort. It wasn't like helping someone who comes into a department store looking for something in particular. No, the door-to-door salespeople knew that most of the people they would talk to either didn't need or didn't want what they were selling. They would be abused. People would slam the door in their faces and hang out signs saying, "No Solicitors." Deciding to be a door-to-door salesperson was akin to hanging a sign around your neck that said, "Kick me."

I want to read this entire passage of scripture so we can put everything into context so that we know who is speaking when and who is reacting and why. This is the third chapter of Jonah, and we start with a part of our scripture from last time:

**Jonah 3:3-9**

**3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.**

**4 Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."**

**5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.**

**6 When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.**

**7 This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:**

**“By the decree of the king and his nobles:**

**Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.**

**8 But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.**

**9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”**

I want you to picture in your mind Jonah, dirty and frustrated, rambling around the center of the city carrying a “The End is Near” sign while shouting out, **“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”** There's that magic number forty again. The question that I ask you is this, “Is Jonah sincere in his desire to serve this Creator who has snatched him from the jaws of death and then placed him at the very worst possible place on earth to preach to people whose only desire is to destroy him, or is he simply resigned to his fate knowing that the words he will be delivering will be ignored and he will still die a horrible

death with his head mounted on a pole in the center of Nineveh? Do we think it might be possible that Jonah was feeling an obligation to God after God saved him from drowning in the storm? Why does it even matter to us why Jonah decided to follow instructions that would lead him to Nineveh? And maybe an even more basic question might be, “How does an Old Testament story give us insight into living a Christian life?” Maybe we just need to think of the book of Jonah as just another big fish story and step back into our confining box of theology, so we don’t have to ponder such lofty things. If we just relegate the story of Jonah back to its basic elements (i.e. Man runs away from God. Man thrown overboard into stormy sea. Big fish swallows man. Man apologizes to God. Man does what God tells him to do), then we don’t have to struggle with the implications of what this scripture could ever possibly mean to us here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thus turning it into a Big Fish story for our children.

I know that this is heavy. This is meat for the hungry. This is water for the thirsty. This is what it means to grow as a Christian as we challenge our preconceptions and look deeper into what God is trying to tell us. This is us tightening our orbit and drawing closer to the mind of our Creator. And yes, it can be confusing. It can be challenging. It can even be frightening at times. This is what the Psalmist is talking about in Psalm 42:

**1 As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.**

**2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.**

**When can I go and meet with God?**

**Why do we care about Jonah's motivations? We care about his motivations because God cares about his motivations. God can't reach the people of Nineveh and bring them truth or encourage them to a state of repentance if Jonah is there for the wrong reasons. The people of Nineveh wouldn't be able to find true repentance if Jonah didn't find true repentance for himself. His entrance into the city cannot be out of obligation or a resignation to fate. Jonah must be walking with God in true repentance and salvation to be able to preach true repentance and salvation effectively.**

**And we know that Jonah's intentions were pure because we can see the result.**

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This proclamation by a king in a huge city who believed that the Jews were scum of the earth; insects to be obliterated. They heard the voice of Jonah speaking the word of God. A God they did not believe in. The God of a people that they despised. ...and they believed the words. So much so, that they committed themselves to a repentant nature and wore sackcloth. They fasted. They made their animals wear sackcloth and fast as well. They prayed that God would not destroy them. They pleaded with a God that they did not know to avoid destruction. And they did it with no assurance of the outcome.

**9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”**

Even Jonah didn't believe that it would make a difference. He was firmly convinced that there was no possibility that the message would be heard and fully expected God to destroy the city of Ninevah, even though he did his part. But the people did listen. From arrogance to repentance. From warriors to peace seekers. From conquerors to neighbors. And it was the king, the leader of the people, who directed the change. The repentance trickled down from the uppermost parts of Ninevah. I fear we still haven't learned this lesson even today, that leadership by example is the most important aspect of true leadership; that people will often imitate their leaders, right or wrong.

**And while this story talks about the repentance of the entire city of Nineveh, it doesn't change the idea that repentance is a personal choice. Like our story today about Speedy, we all come to those forks in the road where we must choose to step into the role of repentance and take responsibility for our lives and the people around us, or choose to ignore that responsibility for personal gain, leaving everyone else to hold the bag. Do we care enough about the people in our lives to share with them the way we have found embrace the role that Jesus gives us and share with them the grace and mercy that can only be found by owning up to our mistakes?**

**I would like for us all to ponder these words in the coming week. Don't jump to any assumptions about this story so that we are unable to glean new understanding from it. It would be good for us to thirst after God's words and spirit. Spend time reading through the book of Jonah. It's only four chapters long and so full of lessons to be gleaned. Ponder the fact that our salvation, bought at such an extreme price by Jesus Christ our Lord, is a matter to be shared; that our salvation should propagate into the salvation of others. Can the people around us see us walking humbly with Jesus no matter the situations that we face? The salvation of others depends on our understanding of our own repentance and salvation. It is through sharing our stories that we become encouragers to the people we influence that are so in need of understanding the love of our God.**

**God bless you all!**

**AMEN**

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